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TAGS: [PREL](#) [OVIP](#) [MASS](#) [MARR](#) [EC](#)  
SUBJECT: ADMIRAL STAVRIDIS' FIRST VISIT TO QUITO AS  
SOUTHCOM COMMANDER

REF: QUITO 488

Classified By: DCM Jefferson Brown for Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Admiral Stavridis made his first visit as SouthCom Commander to Quito June 9-12. Along with the Ambassador, Military Group Commander and Acting DATT, he met with the Ecuadorian Minister of Defense (MOD) Javier Ponce, the Chief of Defense (CHOD) General Fabian Varela and then jointly with the commanders of the Army, Navy and Air Force. Atmospherics were cordial and discussions straightforward and productive. ADM Stavridis invited the MOD, CHOD and service chiefs to visit SouthCom and JIATF-South, and privately told the Embassy that he is considering a follow-on visit in February 2009. The CHOD expressed appreciation for USG assistance in training and infrastructure, expressed desire to continue positive mil-mil relations, and specifically asked for assistance in the construction of a Joint Operations Training Center. The service chiefs also provided their requests for assistance. The visit received positive press focusing on constructive cooperation during a time when the GOE has vocally questioned the future of that cooperation. End Summary

¶2. (C) On June 11, ADM Stavridis had his first meeting with Defense Minister Javier PONCE Cevallo, during which atmospherics were friendly, and discussion focused on themes rather than specific policies. The two discussed Minister Ponce's background as a journalist. ADM Stavridis noted that this is the first time that a U.S. admiral is serving as SouthCom commander, giving the region additional focus on sea missions. The two discussed their shared interest in Latin American literature, which very effectively served as an "ice-breaker" to the meeting and established a friendly rapport. They then focused on the importance of civilian control of the military, and the need for dialogue about military exercises and training now that the diplomatic note on military exercises and training has been signed. The Admiral also extended an open invitation for the MOD to visit SouthCom and JIATF-South. Under Secretary General of National Defense Jorge Pena has since told the Military Group Commander that he would help coordinate a visit but would require a written invitation, and that thereafter the dates

and logistics could be worked out.

13. (C) In a separate meeting, the Chief of Defense (CHOD) Division General (3-star equivalent) Fabian VARELA Moncayo expressed appreciation for USG assistance in training, equipment and infrastructure, and expressed the desire to continue positive military to military relations. Varela hinted that the Ecuadorian military is working to better understand Ecuador's current social situation so that the GOE can develop the type of military expected or hoped for by the Ecuadorian people. Varela explained that the Ecuadorian military is looking to develop joint task forces focused on Ecuador's coast, mountainous and Amazon jungle regions. Varela also asked for assistance in the construction of a Joint Operations Training Center for the above mentioned task forces. Both discussed Ecuador's need for helicopters and riverine boats. During the meeting, the CHOD invited the Ambassador to a goodbye lunch at the Joint Command, which has since been expanded to include the MOD.

14. (C) ADM Stavridis also met with the service chiefs of the Army, Navy and Air Force, all of whom expressed the desire for continued cooperation as well as specific requests for assistance. Brigadier General Julio Cesar MANCHENO Gonzalez, the Army's Commander of Ground Operations (who represented Army Commander General Luis Ernesto GONZALEZ Villareal), said that the Ecuadorian Army wanted to continue good relations with the U.S. military. He added that the Army greatly values the Military Group's assistance in Ecuador's northern border, and provided a list of requests for equipment and

assistance (focused mostly on its capacity in the northern border region). Navy Commander Rear Admiral Livio ESPINOSA Espinosa asked for SouthCom's assistance to coordinate the technical transfer of Vulcan Phalanx anti-aircraft weapon systems (Phalanx) as part of the Ecuadorian Navy's purchase of two ex-British Leander class frigates from Chile. He also explained that the Ecuadorian Marines needed rifles and weapons for its new detachments along the northern border. Air Force Commander Brigadier General Rodrigo BOHORQUEZ Flores said that relations between the Ecuadorian Air Force (FAE) and the US Air Force were good, but also voiced concern that the "FAE did not receive any information from the Forward Operating Location (FOL)" at Manta. Bohorquez also pointed out that the FAE had not received radios (that the other Services received). On a positive note, he noted that the USG is helping the Ecuadorian military and highlighted assistance already being coordinated from the U.S. to include a reconnaissance aircraft with surveillance cameras, ten UH-1H helicopters, a C-130 Periodic Depot Maintenance assessment, C-130 JPATs and TPS-70 radar support. While promising to look into the above requests, ADM Stavridis also emphasized that SouthCom was ready to engage with the Ecuadorians to whatever level they felt most comfortable. The tone of the meeting was very cordial and friendly.

15. (C) Bohorquez also briefly raised the issue of the "12 versus (Ecuador's claim to) 200 nautical mile (NM)" difference of territorial waters and air space, expressing an interest in coming to a mutually-agreeable solution. ADM Stavridis suggested that SouthCom might be able to see how "communications" could be used to help alleviate the 12 versus 200 NM issue. (Note: Immediately following the Admiral's visit, the MFA asked the Ambassador to meet with the MOD, Foreign Minister and Navy Commander to discuss a way forward for USG vessels entering Ecuador's claim to territorial waters, scheduled now for June 23.)

16. (C) General Varela, who also attended the meeting with the service chiefs, asked ADM Stavridis to explain the purpose and mission of SouthCom's Fourth Fleet. ADM Stavridis pointed out that the Fourth Fleet would slightly increase the number of U.S. Navy South's personnel but that no aircraft carriers or other U.S. naval vessels would be permanently stationed in SouthCom's area of focus. He added that the Fleet's focus would not be offensive, rather on peacekeeping, counter drug operations, disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. ADM Stavridis invited the CHOD and

service chiefs to visit the Fourth Fleet, as well as SouthCom and JIATF-South, and urged them to encourage Ecuador's political leadership to also visit these venues.

17. (SBU) Press coverage of the visit was straightforward in all media, noting tensions in military relations in recent months but casting this visit in neutral-to-positive terms. Minister Ponce described the visit as "protocolary" in nature, and the press picked up on the language of the Embassy's press release describing the Admiral's focus "dialogue on friendship and cooperation between the militaries of both countries, as well as topics of security of mutual interest." One leading Quito daily featured a very positive blurb in a weekly political wrap-up column about the two leaders, surprising discussion of literature. The visit by Mrs. Laura Stavridis to the orphanage "Hogar Para Sus Ninos" highlighted a donation by the SouthCom of \$10,000 for the construction of a roof of one of its shelters, as well as another \$7,200 to "Extreme Response International" for improvements to a day shelter for workers of a garbage disposal site in search of recyclable waste.

18. (C) Comment: The positive nature and timing of Admiral Stavridis' visit is important in maintaining good military to military relations, and comes at a time when civilian leadership of the military and pending investigations of

cooperation, especially in intelligence, has publicly put the relationship with the USG and U.S. military into some question. It will be important to follow up with the GOE and Ecuadorian military in order to enhance the good will created by this visit.

19. (U) This cable has been cleared by SouthCom Commander Admiral Stavridis.  
Jewell